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# CHAPTER 2



## BACKGROUND

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## 2.1 Historical Background

The Washington Monument, as the nation's foremost memorial to George Washington, is one of the most recognizable structures in the United States. It is also a premier example of Egyptian Revival architecture and a notable accomplishment of 19<sup>th</sup>-century engineering. The Washington Monument was one of the first historic properties to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966 and has also been listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.

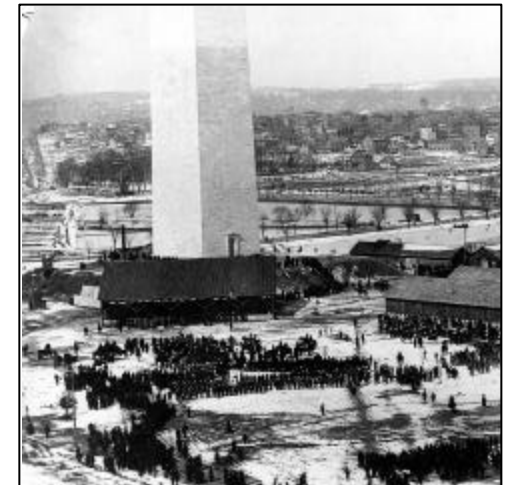
Plans for a national monument to Washington began in 1783. However, initial discussions were for a figural sculpture of the president. In 1833, the newly formed Washington National Monument Society announced its intention to erect a monument "whose dimensions and magnificence shall be commensurate with the greatness and gratitude of the nation which gave [George Washington] birth [and] whose splendor will be without parallel in the world." The Society initiated an architectural design competition in 1836, which prominent architect Robert Mills won with a plan to "harmoniously lend durability, simplicity, and grandeur." As Assistant Architect of the Capitol, his landscape designs for the Mall featured the Washington Monument as the focus of picturesque gardens and winding formal pathways.

Construction began in 1848, but stagnated due to monetary issues and then the onset of the Civil War. Construction resumed in 1878 under the direction of Lt. Colonel Thomas L. Casey of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Casey altered Mills' original design and proposed an unadorned Egyptian obelisk with a pointed pyramidion. A 3,300-pound capstone was placed at the top and was crowned with a 9-inch-tall aluminum pyramid. The Monument was dedicated in 1885 by President Chester A. Arthur and opened to the public in 1888, 40 years after the initial cornerstone was laid.

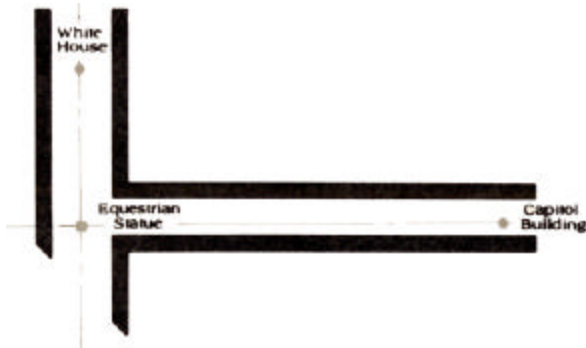
The Washington Monument Grounds have served and continue to serve as a vital public space in the Nation's Capital for celebrations, demonstrations, and recreation. The Grounds have experienced nearly continual change over the last 200 years, from the filling of marshland as part of the McMillan Plan to livestock grazing to Civil War encampments to temporary World War II structures to the introduction of the Sylvan Theatre.



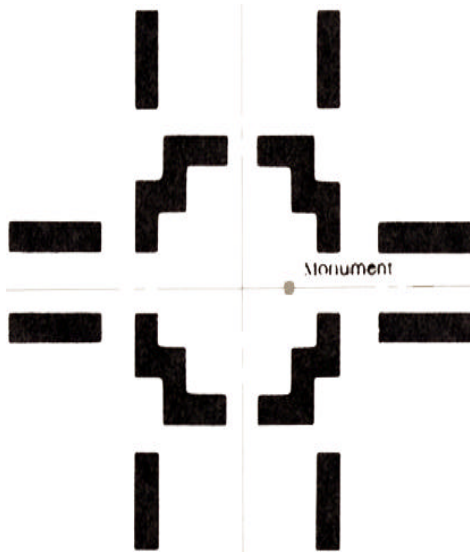
Construction of the Monument began in the 1840s and resumed in the 1880s.



American troops at the dedication of the Monument in 1885.



Basic form of the 1791 L'Enfant Plan for Washington, DC.



Basic form of the 1901 McMillan Plan for the National Mall.

## 2.2 Background to the Planning Process

### Historical Plans

L'Enfant's Plan for Washington, DC in 1791 is the sole American example of a comprehensive Baroque city plan and has defined the physical and symbolic character of the nation's capital city through its arrangement of buildings, structures, and views. The plan dictated that a monument to Washington should be built where the east-west axis from the Capitol along the National Mall to the western horizon intersects with the north-south axis from the House to the southern horizon. When construction began in 1848, however, the designated site was unstable marshland and the Monument was consequently erected slightly southeast of the intersection.

The Senate Park Commission of 1901, known as the McMillan Commission, expanded the L'Enfant Plan to create the most elegant example of City Beautiful tenets in the nation. The McMillan Plan intended to reconcile the relocated Washington Monument with the L'Enfant plan geometry and its original siting for the Monument, as well as reserve the Monument Grounds for public enjoyment. The McMillan Commission proposed that the Monument be flanked by formal, sunken gardens to the north and south; to the west, the design proposed a 300-foot-wide marble staircase that descended 40 feet from the platform to an oval pool and another formal sunken garden. The Monument's reflection in the oval pool would create the illusion that the Monument had been realigned with the north-south axis from the White House. While the design would have fulfilled the desired geometric integrity of L'Enfant's Plan, concerns at the time over structural issues and cost complaints led the commission to abandon the proposed design.

Guidelines for the National Mall were prepared in 1932 by Fredrick Law Olmstead Jr., Fredrick A. Delano, and other commissioners based on interpretations of the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans. This vision included an "open vista" between the Capitol and the Washington Monument and became a part of the 1933 Department of the Interior plan.

## Recent Plans

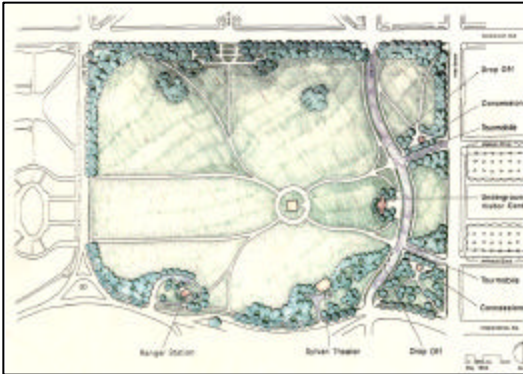
Regardless of design nuances, the various iterations of design concepts for the Washington Monument and Grounds over the last 30 years have maintained the spirit of the L'Enfant Plan by maintaining the primary structures and monuments “as dominant elements in the landscape” and fitting the plans to the site’s topography. The plans accommodate modern needs within the “goals of preserving and enhancing important vistas, ensuring harmony and continuity with adjacent monumental areas, and enhancing the quality of the visitor experience.” The proposed action is the culmination of a more than 30-year planning effort.

A 1966 plan for the National Mall sought to maintain the integrity of the principal east-west axis of the L'Enfant Plan through formalized settings. The plan was revised in 1973, substituting more modest proposals in the hope of seeing them realized before the Bicentennial in 1976. Another 1973 plan proposed an underground visitor services structure that ringed the Monument and connected to a below-grade elevator landing. Some of the proposals on the Mall were instituted, but funds ran out before those affecting the Grounds could be implemented. In 1974, the NPS prepared an interim plan for the Monument Grounds to temporarily improve conditions during the Bicentennial. None of the 1974 proposals was implemented, but they were reflected in the preparation of subsequent plans.

In 1981, the Development Concept Plan (DCP) recognized that “design continuity is lacking, graceless and unsymmetrical features diminish visual quality, and modern structures and facilities intrude on vistas and detract from the site’s integrity” and incorporated the best of the previous plans so that the Grounds would be compatible with other parts of the Mall (NPS 1981). In 1982, the 1981 DCP was modified and approved to add landscape improvements and above-ground buildings. In 1986, a plan for an above-ground visitor’s center located in the Monument’s viewshed was rejected by the Federal review agencies. In 1989, the approved DCP was further modified to recommend four principal proposals: (1) visitor services should shift from the Monument base to the Sylvan Theatre area, (2) the Monument Plaza would have a grassy area for passive use, (3) 15<sup>th</sup> Street would be realigned, and (4) the Monument Lodge would be restored to its original appearance.



Thumbnail representation of the 1981 proposed concept plan for the Washington Monument Grounds.



Thumbnail representation of the 1993 plan for the Monument Grounds.



Portrait of General George Washington.

In 1993 a new plan was prepared that proposed restoration of the Monument Lodge as the entrance to a new underground visitor facility and walkway modifications to meet universal accessibility. Various elements have been realized, such as the realignment of 15<sup>th</sup> Street (and Madison and Jefferson Drives), improvement of pedestrian connections on the east side to adjacent parcels, and the relocation of the tourmobile stops outside of the primary National Mall viewshed. Other elements were not implemented, such as restoration and adaptation of the Monument Lodge as a portal to the visitor facility, various walkway modifications, improvements to the plaza at the Monument's base, and removal of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street parking lot. Beginning in 1998, a series of temporary security measures were implemented. These included the installation of temporary concrete jersey barriers around the Monument in 1998, and the construction of an interim visitor screening facility at the eastern entrance to the Monument in 2001.

### 2.3 Significance of the Washington Monument

The Washington Monument is significant as the United States' foremost memorial to its first president, George Washington. Referred to as a man who was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," Washington guided the United States through its first crucial years as a young country.

The Washington Monument is more than a tribute to the nation's first president. It is also a powerful yet elegant symbol of the ideals of Washington and of democracy. Further, it is a tribute to Washington, DC. In Charles Dickens' words, the "City of Magnificent Intentions" radiates from the National Mall and the Washington Monument Grounds, with the Monument and Grounds forming the political and cultural core of the city.

The Monument and Grounds derive further significance from their design. The gently rolling landscape of the Grounds stands in contrast with the formal French treatment of the Mall and the Reflecting Pool. Further, the Monument's form as an Egyptian obelisk with a pointed pyramidion led it to be one of the first historic properties to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. Reasons cited in the Register for its listing included being the world's largest freestanding stone structure, a major example of Egyptian Revival architecture, and a notable accomplishment of 19<sup>th</sup> century engineering.

## 2.4 Issues and Impact Topics

CEQ regulations and DO-12 indicate that Federal agencies are responsible for a clear and efficient definition of project issues. Following a thorough review of the previous documentation, completion of the public scoping process, and based on the identification of relevant issues, a determination was made as to which impact topics warranted selection for analysis. Within those selected disciplines, a few topics were determined to be of particular importance for the proposed action, and thus were identified for a more comprehensive analysis. Table 2.4-1 indicates the treatment of each of the resource disciplines within this EA.

Three general resource topics were determined through the scoping process to be key issues that warranted a comprehensive analysis. These key issues include Geophysical Resources, because of concerns about the possible subsidence of the Monument; Visual/Scenic Resources, because of the aesthetic sensitivity of the National Mall and the Monument Grounds; and Visitor Experience, because of the popularity and interest in the Monument as a national resource. The analyses for these key resource issues consider the prescriptive guidance outlined in NPS DO-12.

A number of additional resource topics were selected for analysis in this EA based on the potential for impacts from the proposed action. These include Water Resources, Vegetation, Air Quality, Noise, Historic Resources, Land Use/Recreation, Infrastructure, and Transportation.

Prime and Unique Farmlands, Wildlife and Aquatic Life, and Threatened and Endangered Species were determined not to be present within the study area and were thus dismissed from detailed analysis. Further, it was determined that Ethnographic Resources and several Socio-Economic areas, including Population and Economy, Housing, and Community Services, are not relevant to the proposed action. As a result, these topics have also been dismissed from detailed analysis.

**Table 2.4-1  
Treatment of Resource Disciplines**

RESOURCE	STATUS
<b>Natural Resources:</b>	
Geophysical (soils, geology groundwater)	Key Issue
Prime and Unique Farmlands	Dismissed
Water Resources	Selected
Vegetation	Selected
Wildlife and Aquatic Life	Dismissed
Threatened and Endangered Species	Dismissed
Hazardous Materials	Selected
Air Quality	Selected
Noise	Selected
<b>Cultural Resources:</b>	
Historic Resources	Selected
Archaeological Resources	Dismissed
Ethnographic Resources	Dismissed
Cultural Landscapes	Selected
Visual/Scenic Resources	Key Issue
<b>Visitor Use and Experience</b>	
Visitation Patterns	Selected
Visitor Experience	Key Issue
Resource Interpretation	Selected
<b>Socioeconomic Environment:</b>	
Land Use	Selected
Recreation	Selected
Socio-Economic Resources	Dismissed
Population and Economy	Dismissed
Housing	Dismissed
Community Services	Dismissed

## 2.5 Cumulative Relationship to Other Planning Projects

Several ongoing and planned projects within the vicinity of the Washington Monument and Grounds could generate cumulative impacts when considered together with the impacts of the proposed action. These projects are as follows:

1. World War II Memorial – The World War II Memorial currently under construction across 17<sup>th</sup> Street from the Monument Grounds involves the temporary pumping of groundwater during construction of a slurry wall and thus will be considered in the analysis of groundwater resources.
2. Ronald Reagan Building – Ongoing dewatering from the underground garage will be included in the analysis of potential effects on the water table.
3. Red Cross Building – Construction adjacent to the National Capital Red Cross Building at 2000 E Street, N.W. involves temporary dewatering and thus will be addressed in the analysis of cumulative impacts to groundwater.
4. Proposed Parking Lot under the Ellipse – The potential construction of a parking facility under the Ellipse could also involve dewatering during construction and thus could have a temporary impact on groundwater.
5. Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial – Development of the King Memorial on the Tidal Basin at Independence Avenue will be considered in addressing visitation and circulation patterns.
6. NPS Transportation Study – Recommendations contained within this study could generate new concepts relating to transportation and parking.
7. NCPC Report “Designing for Security in the Nation’s Capital” – NCPC is evaluating security issues in the District of Columbia in response to increased threats.

The potential cumulative impacts of these projects, together with the proposed security improvements at the Washington Monument and Grounds, are considered in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of this EA, for Alternatives A, B, and C, respectively.



Location of potential cumulative impact projects.